

PILGRIMAGE
OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO THE HOLY LAND
(8-15 MAY 2009)

FAREWELL CEREMONY

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

*"Queen Alia" International Airport - Amman
Monday, 11 May 2009*

*Your Majesties,
Your Excellencies,
Dear Friends,*

As I prepare for the next stage of my pilgrimage to the lands of the Bible, I want to thank all of you for the warm welcome that I have received in Jordan over these last few days. I thank His Majesty King Abdullah II for inviting me to visit the Hashemite Kingdom, for his hospitality and his kind words. I also express my appreciation for the immense effort that has gone into making my visit possible, and ensuring the orderly unfolding of the various meetings and celebrations that have taken place. The public authorities, assisted by a great number of volunteers, have worked long and hard in order to direct the crowds and organize the different events. The media coverage has enabled countless people to follow the celebrations even if they could not be physically present. As well as thanking those who have made this possible, I wish to extend a special greeting to all who are listening on the radio or watching on television, especially the sick and those confined to their homes.

It has been a particular joy for me to be present at the launching of a number of major initiatives promoted by the Catholic community here in Jordan. The new wing of the *Regina Pacis* Centre will open up fresh possibilities of bringing hope to those who struggle with difficulties of various kinds, and to their families. The two churches to be built in Bethany will enable their respective communities to welcome pilgrims and to foster the spiritual growth of all who worship in that holy place. The University at Madaba has a particularly important contribution to offer to the wider community, in forming young people from various traditions in the skills that will enable them to shape the future of civil society. To all who are involved in these projects, I offer good wishes and the promise of my prayers.

One of the highlights of these days was my visit to the Mosque Al-Hussein Bin Talal, where I had the pleasure of meeting Muslim religious leaders together with members of the diplomatic corps and University Rectors. I would like to encourage all Jordanians, whether Christian or Muslim, to build on the firm foundations of religious tolerance that

enable the members of different communities to live together in peace and mutual respect. His Majesty the King has been notably active in fostering inter-religious dialogue, and I want to put on record how much his commitment in this regard is appreciated. I also gratefully acknowledge the particular consideration that he shows towards the Christian community in Jordan. This spirit of openness not only helps the members of different ethnic communities in this country to live together in peace and concord, but it has contributed to Jordan's far-sighted political initiatives to build peace throughout the Middle East.

Dear Friends: as you know, it is principally as a pilgrim and a pastor that I have come to Jordan. Hence the experiences from these days that will remain most firmly etched in my memory are my visits to the holy places and the moments of prayer that we celebrated together. Once again I want to express the appreciation of the whole Church to those who look after the places of pilgrimage in this land, and I also thank the many people who contributed to the planning of Saturday's Vespers in Saint George's Cathedral and yesterday's Mass at the International Stadium. It was truly a joy for me to experience these Eastertide celebrations in company with the Catholic faithful from different traditions, united in the Church's communion and in witness to Christ. I encourage all of them to remain faithful to their baptismal commitment, mindful that Christ himself received baptism from John in the waters of the river Jordan.

As I bid you farewell, I want you to know that I hold in my heart the people of the Hashemite Kingdom and all who live throughout this region. I pray that you may enjoy peace and prosperity, now and for generations to come. Thank you once again. And may God bless all of you!

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